



Abstract

Community participation in the management and conservation of the built heritage has expanded in many countries and is now internationally regarded as a relevant aspect by conservation stakeholder. The aim of this paper is to describe the role of community participation in the maintenance of the Chinese temples of the north coast of Java which date back to between the 16th and 18th centuries. The research is the result of extensive fieldwork that was carried out in 2010 when 23 temples were studied in eight cities. The main findings of this work show how local communities are involved in maintenance activities and how their essential role affects the conservation of the temples. It is believed that this could be employed as an effective model for the conservation of the wider religious heritage of Indonesia.



Keywords: Community, Participation, Chinese heritage, Java, Indonesia

The role of community participation: learning from the Chinese heritage of Java, Indonesia

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I. Introduction

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The involvement of community is an important element in the conservation and management of the built heritage. This has been emphasized by several scholars (Adhisakti 2007, 8; Tanudirjo 2007, 3; Yuen 2006, 837) who agree that the model for the conservation of endangered heritage should be community-oriented. The involvement of community should start at the outset, where the value of people has to be understood and considered. In each step, from determining the significant heritage values to the process of determining the conservation objectives and plan, and finally to formulating the conservation plan and the review plan, we should allow people to participate. This is a practice which, unfortunately, is not familiar in Indonesia.

This paper explores the practices and strategies developed by the Chinese community to preserve their temples in the north coast of Java. A research was carried out to investigate this issue. The buildings considered in this study date back to between 16th and 18th centuries. Eight cities along the north coastal areas of Java were considered as a study areas, and a total of 23 temples were selected by considering criteria such as: the buildings should have a link with the history of the city, should have an age of more than 100 years, should be used by the community for religious purposes, and regular community-related activities must still take place in the compound. The total of 386 visitors and 39 management staff responded to the survey/questionnaires (see Table 1), and this research was complemented with interviews and direct observations. This was the main method used to collect the data, and the respondents include visitors and the temple's management staff.

No	City	Temples	Visitors questioned	Temple management staff
1.	Semarang	7	185	5
2.	Jakarta	3	26	3
3.	Cirebon	3	14	2
4.	Surabaya	5	63	14
5.	Rembang	2	51	12
6.	Tuban	1	18	1
7.	Tegal	1	9	1
8.	Brebes	1	20	1
Total	8 cities	23 temples	386 respondents	39 respondents

TABLE 1 Number of cities, temples and respondents covered by the survey

II. The development of Chinese temples in Indonesia

Chinese temples in Indonesia are different from the original temples in China (Figure 1 and 2). In Indonesia, Chinese temples started to appear as religious buildings dedicated to Tridharma, which consists of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Therefore the Tridharma community studies the teaching of Confucius, Buddha's discipline and the spirit of Tao (Sunarto 2004, 12; Haryono 2006, 97). Furthermore, in some cities, there are some temples that have adapted to the local culture and have both Chinese and Javanese/Islamic rituals in one place. This is the result of the process whereby, when the Chinese community became more stable in Indonesia and had stronger contacts with the local people, each of them adapted and re-formulated some of their cultural elements. The mixed culture of Chinese and Islamic/Javanese has occurred naturally, and this happened because overseas Chinese have an adaptive character.



Figure 1 and 2. The Tay Kak Sie temple, Semarang, Central Java (1746)

After the Dutch colonisation (17th century), Chinese community had a difficult time in Indonesia. Beside the Chinese ethnic massacre in 1740, the limitations and discriminations towards the Chinese were many. For instance, the Chinese were requested by the Dutch authority to show a permission letter when traveling outside their residence area. This discrimination toward Chinese community has been continued in the New-Order Regime (1967-1998). The negative feeling towards Chinese people or *Tionghoa* (Indonesian term for Chinese person) could not be separated from the government policies which were discriminatory towards the Chinese. Such policies covered the field of culture, education, and religion (Paulus Haryono, 2006, 116). Many temples could not be renovated when in bad condition; other temples were closed, and religious events could not be performed, and generally speaking the Chinese cultural heritage was not regarded as a part of the Indonesian heritage.

¹ Noer, Khaerul Umam. 2008. the Dragon wriggle under the Garuda Grip, The Chinese, from the Lost History to the Finding of identity (which was disappeared), paper presented in the Post Graduate Meeting, Airlangga University, Surabaya

When the New Order government stepped down in 1998, the situation for Chinese community started to change. Under the reformation government, the restriction of the Chinese culture expressions was released; Chinese activities flourished, and even the Chinese New Year has become one national holiday (Noer 2008, 12)¹. The resurgence of Chinese culture has had a positive effect on the Chinese heritage too. It is interesting to notice that although the Chinese heritage experienced difficult circumstances for a long time, its condition is fairly good. It is advocated here that the strength of the Chinese heritage comes from the support of the Chinese community which is an inseparable part of the heritage itself. The Chinese community's attitude towards conservation and management provides us with an important understanding of community involvement in heritage conservation in Indonesia.

III. Sustainable community-based strategies for the conservation of Chinese temples

The involvement of community in temple's activities is wide ranging, contributing towards the sustainable conservation of the building. It includes visitors, daily care staff, and management staff. A discussion of the main findings of the survey/questionnaire is provided below for each group.

The Visitors

Visitors approach the temple mostly for praying, although sometimes they also visit for other purposes such as for meetings and socializing. Most of them usually visit the same temple daily and, based on the survey result, they consider conservation as an important aspect to consider (see Figure 3). Their awareness is based on values such as the temple being a religious place and a symbol of their own community (see Figure 4).

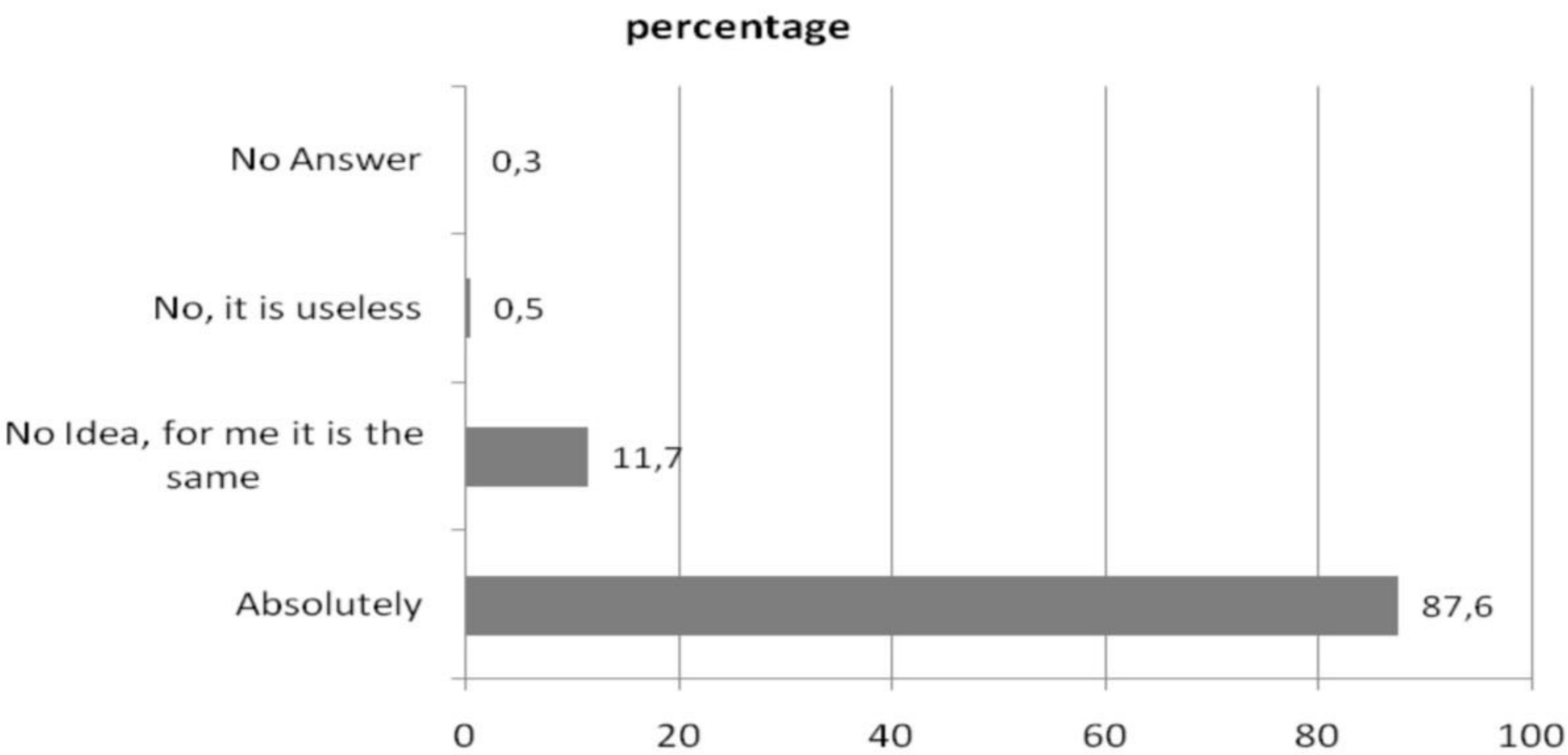


Figure 3: Do you think conservation is an important aspect to consider for this temple?

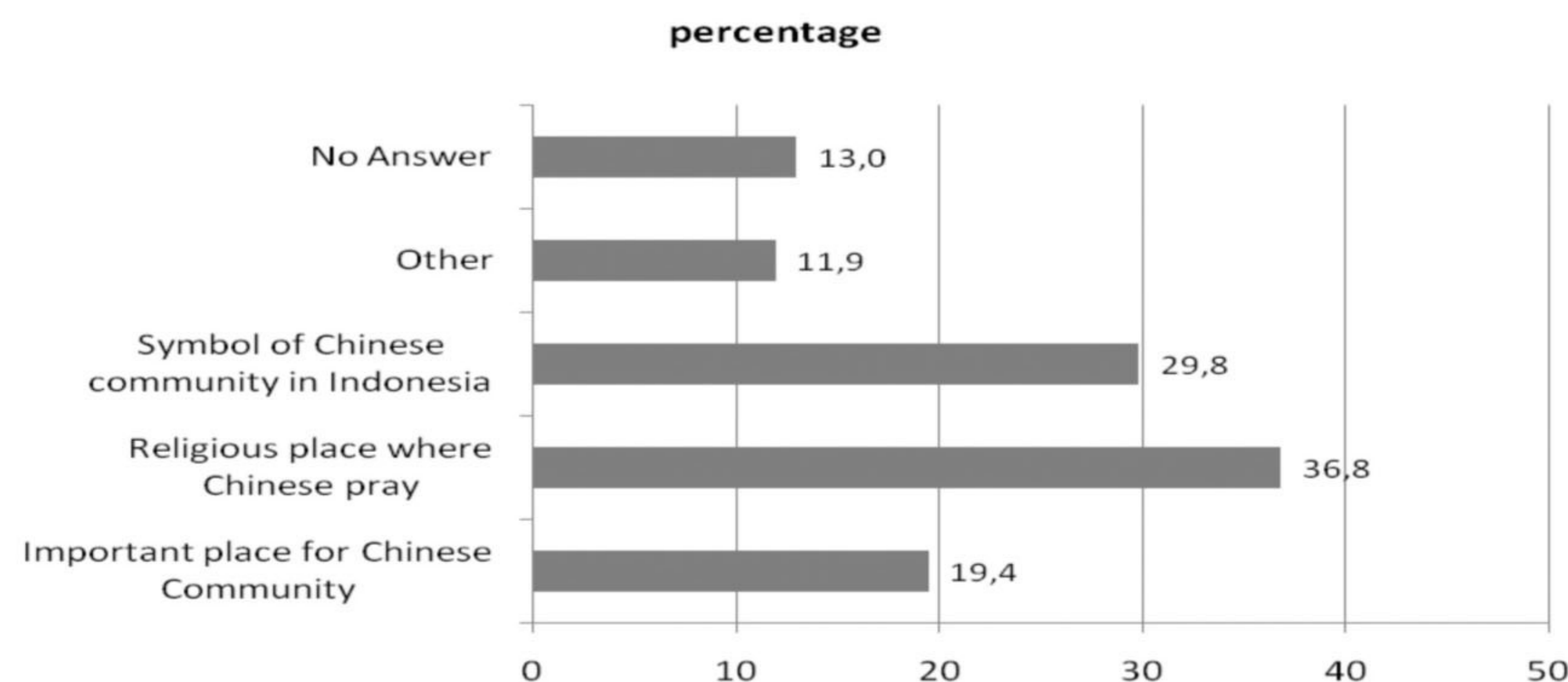


Figure 4: Why do you think this temple should be conserved?

However, having high awareness does not mean that they necessarily or actively participate in the temple's activities. What is intended here for people participation is their wider involvement in activities such as fund raising, religious and cultural events, and in physical activities such as maintenance and repair work. The survey showed that the real participation of visitor is clearly carried out in the form of donations, while their involvement in other cultural as well as physical activities are less evident. Although the awareness of visitors is quite high, the survey shows also that they have little involvement in the activities of maintenance, repair and conservation. Furthermore, this little participation of people in the physical activities is well balanced by the continue use of the temple and by donations, both contributing to the conservation of the temple.

The role of the daily care taker

The daily care taker is also part of the temple's community. He/she is a person who works in the temple on daily basis and this contribution is mostly paid with a salary. The care taker can be recruited informally by the management staff, but sometimes he or she has lived in the temple since a young age. There is no doubt that the awareness, involvement, and motivation of the daily care taker are high. At the same time the contribution from the daily staff cannot be ignored because of the general daily care they provide, but also because of their preparations for praying activities and for the maintainance of the temple.

The survey shows that maintenance work in the temple is carried out mostly by the daily care taker, and not by a professional (see Figure 5). This applies not only to the building, but also to its property: altars, statues, praying equipment, which in most cases have great historical and aesthetic value since were often brought from China hundreds of years ago. It should be also mentioned that often the daily care taker does not have adequate knowledge and craft skills to maintain these valuable properties. It

is suggested here either that daily care takers be properly trained in such activities, or that it is the responsibility of management staff to consider the involvement of conservation professionals to carry out such work.

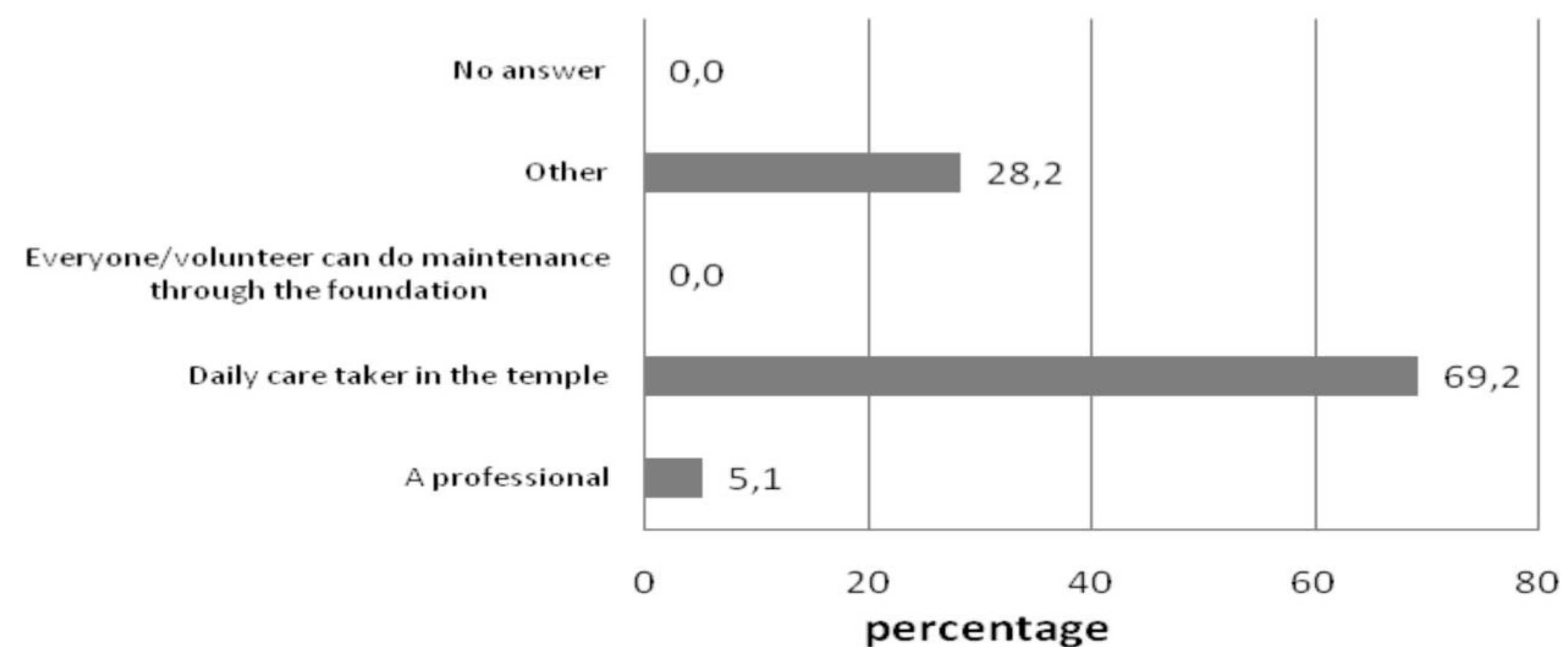


Figure 5: Who carries out the maintenance work in the temple?

Temple management

The management staff takes responsibility for organising the temple's activities. This is the only institution of such type within the temple and therefore its role is relevant for managing the estate. Temple management is run on a voluntary basis and without coercion, and financial motivation is never found when joining: religion and the concern of being of help to other Chinese fellows dominate motivation. In fact, some of the staff motivate their choice as an expression of gratitude to God for the prosperity and fortune they received. Because of this voluntary basis, temple management can be regarded as a form of people participation at a small scale. Despite most of the management staff actually having their main business outside the temple, they are strongly motivated to care about both the temple's life and their culture.

There are many ways to join the foundation: election by members, introduction by parents or relatives who were past members, introduction by friends, and even having lived in the temple since they were very young. It also seems that networking is a powerful way to persuade people to join the foundation.

The role of management staff becomes important when related to their responsibility within the temple (see Figure 6). Organizing rituals and cultural activities is the main concern of most of management staff, although other issues are carried out: promotion, fund raising, organizing social activities as well as building maintenance and other physical works.

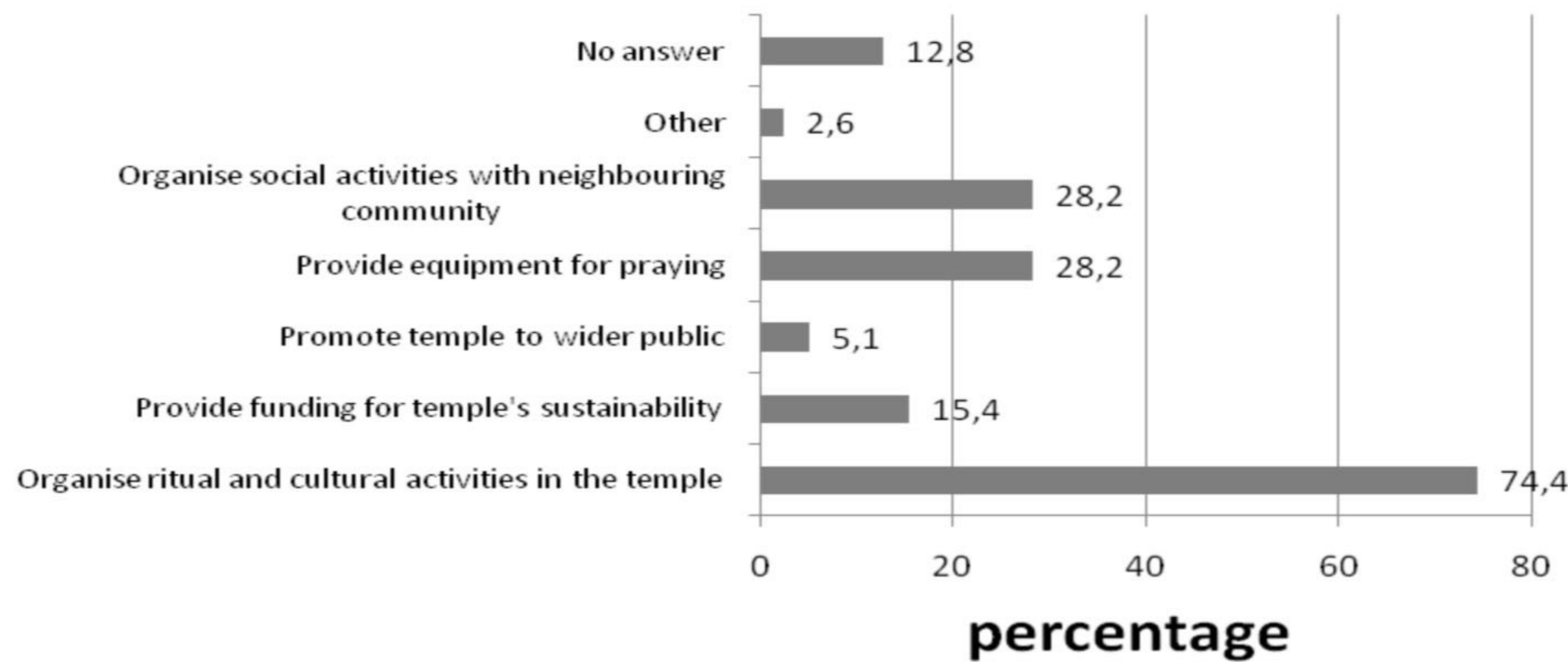


Figure 6: Management staff: what is your responsibility within the temple?

All the activities which are to be carried out within the temple receive approval from the management before execution, and this shows how strong the role of the management staff is. Many decisions such as how the alteration of building should be carried out, who should be involved in the physical work, how to raise the funding, and how to allocate the money are decided in formal meetings, and it comes out from the research result that agreement is very important when decision has to be taken on important issues, showing that there is no single power in the management.

The awareness of people involved in management is quite high and this is shown on Figure 7 which clearly demonstrates that the majority of the staff interviewed makes sure that the original layout of the temple is kept unchanged.

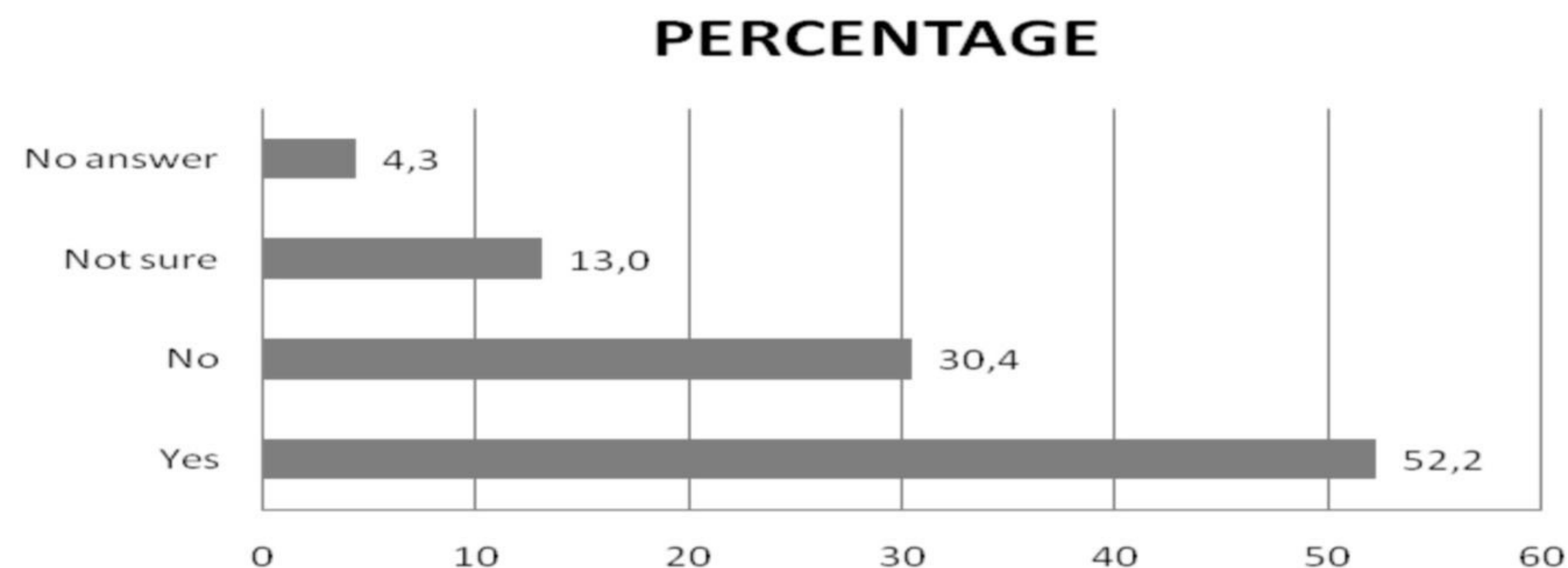


Figure 7: Management staff: is one of your duties to make sure that the original spatial layout of the temple is not changed?

The management staff's awareness can be also seen from policies which are specifically issued by the temple such as not allowing any changes to the temple and still wanting to use traditional materials and skills. However, sometime the policies are not applied in real life because most temples have undergone alterations (although this issue varies from temple to temple). Although they are aware of the temple cultural value and of the importance to conserve the building, unfortunately in the majority of cases alteration work is not carried out with the national conservation standards and regulations as shown by Figure 8, but rather with tacit knowledge. This has to do with the fact that the staff has a limited knowledge of conservation regulations and standards, while at the same time there is a limitation in the involvement of conservation professionals and traditional craftsmen.

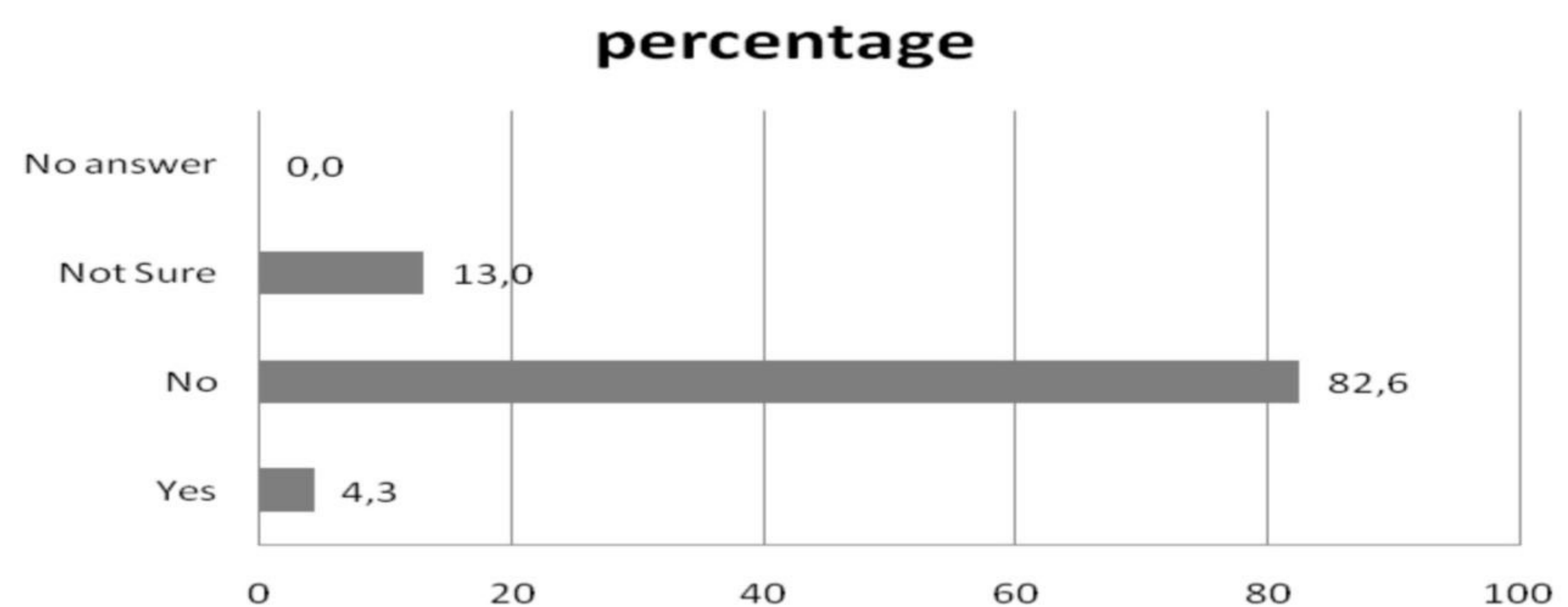


Figure 8: Are the conservation professional and traditional craftsmen involved when conserving the temple?

However, all these limitations do not undermine the relevant role of the management staff in dealing with the involvement of visitors and daily staff, networking, and in contributing to the feeling of being part of the Chinese community and culture.

IV. Networking and ethnicity feeling

Networking plays a great role in many activities, and the management staff use it as a tool to help their actions. Networking relies heavily on the staff's business outside the temple. Fund raising for example is mostly carried out by networking. Most temples usually have a list of donors who would donate money if the management staff asked, whilst bigger temples have permanent wealthy donors who regularly support activities. Those who are already in the donor list usually have a very good relationship with the staff. However, most of the temples have also devised their own way to raise funding as the management realise that they cannot run the temple only with support from outside parties. The main funding of most temples is self financed by donors and no

support is received from the government, as shown by Figure 10. In this sense the temple's staff needs to be more innovative in fundraising; an example of creative fundraising is represented by the Rembang temple (18th century) where donators' names are written on ceramic wall tiles that are purchased as good wish (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. The ceramic tiles represent Chinese legends and are donated by visitors whose names are printed on them, Rembang temple (built in 18th century)

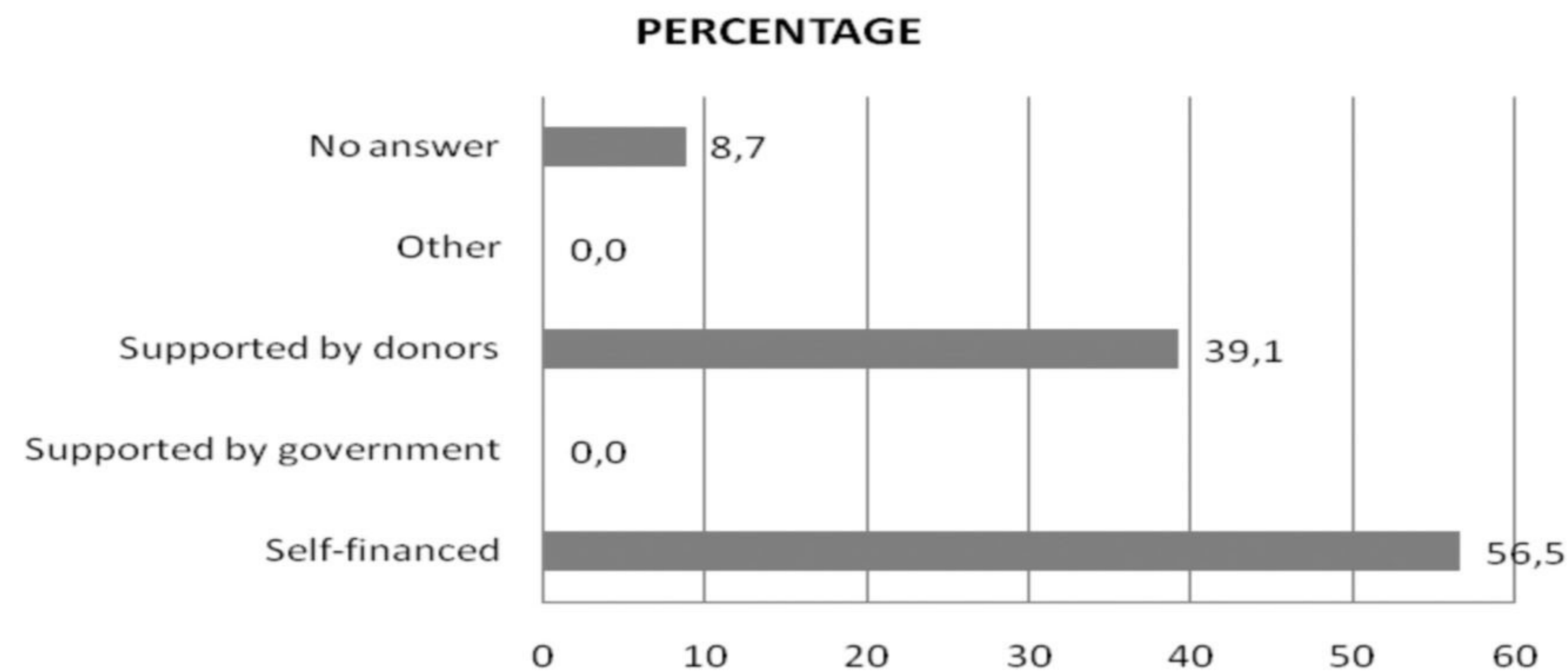


Figure 10: What is the main source of funding for the temple?

Maintenance and repair work are also supported by networking. As explained earlier, most of the maintenance and repair work is carried out by the daily care taker. But in some cases, the management staff gives the work to other people through networking. Usually such people are recruited after recommendations from the management staff. Recruitment is mostly based on the good relationship with the management staff and not because of their skills, since very few conservation professional have been involved. In this case maintenance and other physical work is based on their tacit knowledge. However, when the work needs a traditional Chinese craftsman, the management usually appoints a traditional Chinese craftsman.

In order to support religious activities, networking also plays a big role especially at the special events such as the birthday of the God or Goddess. In such occasion neighbouring temples' management staff is invited not only to attend the event, but sometime to be actively involved in the procession (see Figure 11 and 12).



Figure 11 and 12: A special procession event in Tay Kak Sie Temple of Semarang which involved other temple's managements

V. Conclusion

The Chinese temple community of north Java, which includes visitors, daily care staff, and management staff, positively contributes to conservation with different degrees of participation. Visitors mostly participate financially and are less involved in physical work, while daily staff is mostly involved in practical work such as cleaning and preparation for religious rituals. In terms of management, the staff mostly deals with planning issues. However, the survey showed that they have a strong awareness of conservation due to the values that they attribute to the temple. They play an important role in the sustainability of temple. Management is carried out at a small scale because it is voluntary-based and the involvement of people is mainly due to their concern to their own culture and feeling of being part of the Chinese community. The responsibility of the management staff covers religious activities, cultural activities, building maintenance and repair. It also covers promoting and fund raising. To support all these activities, the management uses networking among both the Chinese community and the Chinese temple itself.

The strategy developed by temple management is the combination of all potential elements which are attached to the temple's community: the feeling of being of Chinese ethnicity, the feeling of belonging to this culture, and expressing their religion. The totality of such elements contribute to the strong support that the continuity gives to the conservation of the temple.



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